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The identity and demarcation of management in family of social sciences

Abstract: The objectives of the paper is presentation of chosen problems of identity of management. The author tried to answer the question about demarcation of management from other social sciences. In conclusion author that management like most of the social sciences has blurred boundaries and demarcation from other social sciences cannot be very precise. Blurred boundaries of management science give rise to certain institutional problems, but are also a source of creative solutions. Thus, the author is in favour of the approach of a weak distinction, which allows us to examine problems that are also a subject of other disciplines, and to use methods and research perspectives drawn from different sciences.

Key words: identity of management, management as a science, demarcation of management, boundaries of management

1. Introduction

Scientific identity is one answer to the question of identification: what are the characteristics of our discipline, and who are we – researchers of organisation and management? Using the terminology drawn from our tool kit, we can ask a question about the mission of management science. As with any metaphor, using a term like ‘mission’ with reference to management emphasises certain threads, and conceals others. The mission of science is its cognitive and practical role. However, contrary to the organisational mission, the mission of science is not an intentional construction of individuals or social groups. Science is a collective work

by researchers and recipients that develops spontaneously as a part of social and cognitive processes in a historical time. Still, this does not change the key question about the significance of the given discipline [Sułkowski 2012].

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2. Orientations of management

The mission and identity of management science is not universal and timeless – it is a social construct which undergoes historical changes. The evolution of the mission and identity of our science has taken place in relation to other sciences. Management science, at different stages of its development, has used the ideas, scientific perspectives and methodologies of many other fields and disciplines. Examples include notions, concepts and methods borrowed from the natural sciences, technical sciences, economics and humanities. The oldest source of inspiration are the technical sciences [Martyniak 1996, p. 9]. In this current, organisation is presented materially and subject to optimisation processes through the management system. Objectivist and pragmatic points of view dominate, while the methodology is based on the processes of planning, monitoring and controlling. The representatives of this classical school of management are F.W. Taylor, H.L. Gantt and F. and L. Gilberth. Another area of influence on management science is related to economics. The economic perspective of an organisation and management suggests adopting the angle of entrepreneurship science, the classical version of which combines a limited rationalism approach, *homo oeconomicus* with a market orientation and a striving for the profitability of economic activities. The deductive perspective adopted from economics is combined with the preference for statistical methods. A. Marshall, J.O. McKinsey, E. Kosiol and W. Baumol can be considered representatives of this approach. It is

hard not to notice the development of management science's fascination with the natural sciences. This influence resulted mainly from the assimilation of neopositivist and later systemic concepts. The push for monism in the sciences was manifested in the establishment of the ideal of objective, verifiable knowledge which is discovered with the use of scientific method. Neopositivist thinking did not create its own management school, although it had the key influence on engineering and economic currents, or even the sociological one. The systemic school can be treated as a continuation of the neopositivist current, as it also adopts the assumptions of a scientific unity and the universal character of scientific methods. K.E. Boulding [1956] and R.L. Ackoff [1973] can be seen as the main representative of this approach. A new current, stemming from the natural sciences, or to be more precise, the Darwinian paradigm, is neo-evolutionism in management, combining the perspective of behavioural economics with evolutionary psychology. The influence of the humanities included sociological and psychological thinking. According to the dominant view, an organisation and management are psychosocial processes of an inter-subjective character, which can be viewed from different cognitive perspectives with the use of numerous research methods. The representatives of this current of management science are M. Weber, E. Mayo, P. Selznick and M. Crozier (Table 1) [Weber 1946; Mayo 1933; Selznick 1957; Crozier 1967].

The most important argument for drawing inspiration and combining approaches from different sciences is in the striving for the integration of scientific problems and methods. The order of scientific areas, fields and disciplines is a kind of social and academic convention, while numerous research problems are located on the boundaries between different disciplines. Thus, epistemological and methodological inspirations drawn from other areas of science can lead to new scientific solutions, which are not visible from the perspective of a representative of one discipline. Such interdisciplinary inspirations include, for example, the issues of a systemic theory of organising or neoevolutionism in management.

Table 1. The influence of other areas and fields on management science

Criterion	Technical sciences	Economics	Natural sciences	Humanities
Subject	An organisation – material perspective Management – a material and practical process	An organisation – symbolic perspective Management – an economic process	An organisation – material perspective Management – a material and information process	An organisation – functional perspective Management – a social process
Research point of view	Objectivism, pragmatism	Objectivism, verificationism, functionalism	Objectivism, verificationism	Intersubjectivism Functionalism or symbolic interactionism
Methodology	Inductive, methods of planning, monitoring and controlling	Deductive, statistical analysis methods	Inductive, paraexperimental methods, mathematisation of research	Inductive, deductive and constructivist methods of social research
Examples of problems	1. Optimisation of the work process 2. Implementation of technology	1. Market activity of an enterprise 2. Microeconomic understanding of an enterprise	1. Systemic image of an organisation 2. Evolutionary conditions of management and leadership	1. Social processes in organisations 2. Power in organisations
Examples of researchers	F.W. Taylor, H.L. Gantt, F. i L. Gilberth M.P. Follet	A. Marshall, J.O. McKinsey, E. Kosiol, W. Baumom	K.E. Boulding R.L. Ackoff	M. Weber, E. Mayo P. Selznic M. Crozier

Source: Own work with the use of L.J. Krzyżanowski 1999, pp. 107-109, Hatch 2002, p. 22.

Using the potential of other fields of science in management is a creative tool, as long as the criteria for reflectiveness and distance are adhered to. Reflectiveness means that the notions, concepts and methods transferred to our discipline are adopted to the specificity of manage-

ment science [Weick 1999, pp. 797–806]. It is also important not to transfer them mechanically, or even worse, in an oversimplified way. What is important, is to understand the transferred perspective and methodology, which is usually related to the specificity of sciences other than management. This means that a number of notions cannot be used literally, but form a kind of metaphor, which should be treated with reserve. Researchers need to be aware of the metaphoric and limited character of the ways of getting to know an organisation and management. The belief that a scientific point of view and methods can be transferred literally and thoughtlessly to management leads to an exhausting of the possibilities of the given metaphor and cognitive perspective. The error of hypostasis has already been repeated a number of times in management science, for example in the approaches of systemic, engineering and cultural functionalism. Metaphors were treated literally as real descriptions of reality, and with time they became empty and one-sided. Only when they are treated figuratively and with reserve, reflexively and critically, as one possible point of view, can they be cognitively useful [Morgan 1997].

3. Demarcation of management science

The described influences of different areas, fields and disciplines on management science make up an image of interdisciplinary science that, in order to build its own identity, should identify the areas of its cognitive separateness from other disciplines. The problem of demarcation concerns the cognitive basis of all sciences, especially the social sciences. It can be interpreted as a question of marking out relatively clear and permanent boundaries between different sciences. In the case of management science, drawing borders is especially difficult and separates it from economics, sociology, social psychology and other scientific fields and disciplines, which results in numerous unsolved environmental discussions.

In view of the demarcation of management science, one can distinguish two contradictory approaches. The first is related to a call for total

and clear separation from other sciences, and I would call this a strong distinction of management science. The second approach, defined as a position of weak distinction, is based on the assumption of inseparability of a number of issues concerning management science from other social sciences, the humanities or even technical sciences.

When attempting to reconstruct the way of thinking related to the demarcation of management science, one has to refer to arguments of ontological, epistemological, methodological and institutional characters. The ontological argument is the assumption that there is a level of organisational and managerial processes, which is by nature different from other spheres of the functioning of reality. It seems that the assumption may be right, at least at the current stage of science development, if we want to point to differences between the natural and social world. However, if we narrow the discussion to the area of social sciences, a problem arises. In the social sphere, we deal with reflexive subjects that shape reality. Communication, cooperation between people, exercising power and making decisions are a few examples of processes taking place in the social world, which are universal to the extent that they do not only fit one of the historically shaped social sciences. All these processes can be found in management science, as well as economics, sociology and anthropology. Thus, it is difficult to find an unambiguously ontological basis for distinguishing our science based on the nature of reality.

The argument of epistemological nature here is a statement of the fundamental separateness of management science from other sciences, from the point of view of the study subject. Similarly to ontology, it is easy to find the basic differences between the spheres of social and natural sciences in epistemology. Thus, social sciences differ from natural sciences in terms of the study subject and relations, the position and orientation of researchers and heuristics. This demarcation is quite clear, but still a number of social researchers silently accept the cognitive ideals drawn from natural sciences. In the case of management science, this leads to the development of a scientific approach, which results in numerous contradictions. One of the problematic issues is diversifying the epistemological criteria between different social sciences, and the conclusion is that although one can point to certain differences of an epistemo-

logical nature, many social sciences still have common and mutually overlapping research fields.

It is difficult to find an unambiguous, crystallised study of management science which is fundamentally different from other sciences. Unfortunately, a trivial notion suggesting itself that the point is research on 'managerial processes' does not offer a disjunctive division of our discipline from other social sciences. According to the definition adopted for the English and Polish term 'management', it can be applied to both people and most types of organisations and social groups, so also countries, regions or political parties. Management, as already mentioned in the previous chapter, can be understood in a number of ways, including the process of making decisions, exercising power or the rationalisation of activities.

The methodological argument is looking for unique methods created within a given discipline and appropriate mostly from the point of view of its study subject and the research perspective used. However, according to A. K. Koźmiński, management science is characterised by 'methodological underdevelopment' [Koźmiński 2006]. It borrows and develops methods and techniques from other sciences but does not create its own, characteristic research method. Thus, it can be poly-methodological and interdisciplinary, but it is difficult to see a clear demarcation of the methods used in management science and other social sciences.

Finally, the institutional argument is the belief that management science is separate, as it has developed its own academic institutions that are a social reflection of the development level of a scientific discipline. Whilst it is true that numerous business schools have opened, resulting in a large number of students and graduates of management programmes, and that the growth of publications and development of teaching staff specialising in management is very rapid, if we try to look closer at the identity of both theoreticians and practitioners of management we can see that it is blurred. On the one hand, there is an inflow of specialists in different fields, who focus on the problems of management – usually on the borderline between different disciplines – while on the other, there is no social reproduction in the academic environment of management science, especially in Poland. Management specialists often hold

degrees in economics, sociology, psychology or even philosophy, mathematics or anthropology, but not in management science. What is characteristic of this lack is the fact that the profession of a specialist in management science has no appropriate name, unlike in the case of specialists in other fields of study. We can find economists, sociologists, psychologists, philosophers or anthropologists, but there are no 'managerialists'. The practical aspect of this education which results in a manager, a businessman or an entrepreneurship is not the same as a scientist. A researcher specialising in management science would not use any of those terms. Also, the professional identity is softened by the performance of different, often remote functions in organisations. Accountants, financial advisers, marketing specialists, PR specialists, personnel officers are only a few examples of professional groups coming from the management science, but being to a large extent separate in terms of identity.

Problems with the institutional definition of the boundaries of management science are also reflected in questions of scientific policy. In the Polish environment, there have been some famous disputes over acknowledging the degree of *doktor habilitowany* which, according to some members of the academic collective, does not belong to certain disciplines. However, it seems that all these institutional problems are only a consequence of an inherent feature of management science, which is the overlapping of its study subject, the methods used and the research perspective with other sciences. Thus, we are not able to reverse the problem and specify the subject and place of management science in the institutional sense, leaving blurred epistemological categories. This would entail impoverishing management science by leaving only its characteristic problems, such as those related solely to making rational managerial decisions in enterprises. The seemingly 'marginal' issues, which overlap with other sciences, would be rejected. However, in practice, there are many more marginal issues than those at the core, and it is on the boundary of scientific disciplines where creative solutions are located. So what can be done about the real, serious problems related to the institutional evaluation of the output of people and scientific units? It seems that the criterion for the quality of work should prevail over the criterion of disciplinary purity. An effective system of parametrisation

of units and providing opportunities to perform interdisciplinary evaluation of scientific output, should contribute to the improvement of the scientific evaluation.

Table 2. Strong vs. weak distinctions of management science

Criterion	A strong distinction of management science	A weak distinction of management science
Ontological	The world of organisations and management is separate from the social and economic spheres	The world of organisation and managements is inseparably related to the social and economic spheres
Epistemological	Cognitive categories specific to organisations and management	Cognitive categories shared with other social sciences
Methodological	Methods characteristic of management science	Methods drawn from social sciences
Institutional	A strong academic and professional identity, clearly separate from other sciences	Interdisciplinary academic and professional identity, pointing to certain differences of management science, but issues and competences of management science also clearly overlapping with other social sciences

Source: Own work.

From the point of view of arguments of a cognitive (ontological, epistemological and methodological) and institutional nature, it seems that the approach of a weak distinction of management science is more justified. It means that a number of significant problems are equally important from the point of view of other sciences, while the methodology and research perspective of management science is very interdisciplinary.

‘Management’ is a separate scientific discipline, having a specific subject, methods and institutional form. However, it is worth noting that, from the theoretical point of view, it is a discipline *in statu nascendi*. It can also be said that management, similarly to other social sciences, has ‘blurred boundaries’. A designed area of management can have a more

rigid demarcation from other sciences, but the examination of practice and theory reveals a much broader range of problems common to management and a number of other social sciences as well. This is why I propose understanding the area of management science in a liberal way, as a sphere of scientific, economic and social practices, dealt with by people considering themselves practitioners or theoreticians of management. Critical assessment of the output produced with the use of cognitive perspectives of different sciences seems to be more important than the marking out of strict boundaries.

4. Conclusions

In summary, the problem of demarcation in management can be solved by defining the specific character of the study subject, its partial disjunction from other disciplines and institutional unity, and the separateness of this science. Management science studies organise human activity, taking into consideration the socio-economic aspects. The core of management related to the world of organisation has been outlined, but the debatable part is its periphery, which is unavoidable in the case of any social science. The theory of organisation and management draws from a number of scientific fields, and its strength lies in its diversity [Masłyk-Musiał 2010, p. 15]. The sub-disciplines of management follow different directions. Some have engineering inspirations (production and quality management, logistics), others are related to economics (managerial accounting, operational research), and some to humanities (human resources management, organisational culture). Thus, management includes two (technical and economic or humanist) or even multiple areas of focus on the examined issues. Perhaps it is a permanent feature of the discipline, worth developing by moving towards epistemological pluralism. Management science is a field of the borderline and many tensions (f.ex. Between neopositivistic vs. alternatives paradigms) [Sułkowski 2004]. It combines problems, ideas, cognitive perspectives and methodologies of numerous sciences. It does not offer one, coherent image of an organisation and management as it used to be, but allows one to see the complexity and significance of issues undertaken by this science. It seems

that an open approach to the epistemology of management makes it possible to use different, sometimes even contradictory or incommensurable ideas and concepts that enrich our knowledge about the word of organisation. Having a lodestar in the form of the core of management science, we should not narrow the discourse on the borderlines. Furthermore, it seems that there is often no epistemological answer to the question of whether a specific problem belongs to a given field or discipline of a social science. It is only a historically and culturally relative convention. Blurred boundaries of management science give rise to certain institutional problems, but are also a source of creative solutions. Thus, I am in favour of the approach of a weak distinction, which allows us to examine problems that are also a subject of other disciplines, and to use methods and research perspectives drawn from different sciences.

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